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FM AMEMBASSY ANKARA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5449  
INFO RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD IMMEDIATE 1142  
RHMFISS/39ABG CP INCIRLIK AB TU IMMEDIATE  
RHMFISS/425ABG IZMIR TU//CC// IMMEDIATE  
RHMFISS/EUCOM POLAD VAHINGEN GE IMMEDIATE  
RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL IMMEDIATE  
RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK IMMEDIATE  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC//J-3/J-5// IMMEDIATE  
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE  
RUEUITH/ODC ANKARA TU//TCH// IMMEDIATE  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC//USDP:PDUSDP/ISA:EUR/ISA:NESA/DSCA//  
RUEHAK/USDAO ANKARA TU IMMEDIATE

UNCLAS ANKARA 000417

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SUBJECT: TURKEY: MEDIA COVERAGE OF MILITARY OPERATION IN  
NORTHERN IRAQ

REF: A. ANKARA 0389 AND PREVIOUS

[1](#)B. ANKARA 0398

[1](#)1. (U) Summary: Civilian and military officials have had to respond to criticism from the opposition, reflected both in the mainstream and opposition press, that Turkey bowed to U.S. pressure to withdraw its troops from northern Iraq. The withdrawal occurred the day after Defense Secretary Gates' February 28 visit to Ankara. At the same time, there was media speculation that the Turkish General Staff (TGS) did not inform President Gul and PM Erdogan of the troop withdrawal until it was underway, and indeed after Iraqi sources had announced it. Opposition figures also criticized the government for pulling out the troops before all objectives were accomplished. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (U) All media outlets covered the withdrawal of Turkish troops from northern Iraq, with much speculation focused on the role the US played in the timing of the pullout. Mainstream Vatan criticized the government, noting that "the withdrawal came in the aftermath of US warnings for an end to the operations." In their view, that signalled "speculation that Turkey was acting according to US influence." Opposition CHP leader Deniz Baykal, in a TV interview, also suggested the withdrawal was due to US pressure when he asked rhetorically, "Has the decision to withdraw been taken independent of the US, if so, when?" Mainstream Hurriyet noted CHOD Gen Buyukanit's statement that one third of Turkish troops had already left before Defense Secretary Gates held meetings in Ankara. In an interview with mainstream Milliyet, Buyukanit noted the timing of the visit was "out of our control," adding, "We make decisions according to military expediency. I mean, we do not factor in whether Gates is coming here or not...Our withdrawal was perfect, smooth as silk. Am I going to give away clues about the operation?" Islamist-oriented Zaman quoted CJCS Admiral Mullen as saying "The US did not give Turkey any dates for withdrawing from Iraq."

[1](#)3. (U) Some commentators reported the government was kept out of the loop on the decision to withdraw from northern Iraq. Leftist Taraf reported the withdrawal of troops was a surprise to PM Erdogan and that the government was notified of the withdrawal only after it was completed. Mainstream Aksam added Erdogan had no time to make adjustments to his address to the nation on February 29, in which he said operations were still continuing in northern Iraq. The topic

was brought up to CHOD Gen. Yasar Buyukanit in his interview with Milliyet, to which he reportedly replied, "It (the government) may not be aware of every minute. But in general terms they knew what was going on." He added, "Of course he (PM Erdogan) knew there would be a withdrawal. But naturally, he would not know what is happening from one minute to the next...But in my opinion, what he said in his address to the nation about the operation continuing was correct in terms of operational security." Islamist-oriented Zaman quoted President Gul who echoed Gen. Buyukanit, saying, "Of course I knew about the withdrawal...The operation ended the way it was planned. Talking publicly about military plans would have jeopardized our troops in northern Iraq."

¶4. (U) A number of media outlets were critical of the decision to withdraw troops and speculated that cross border operations have only been stopped temporarily. Zaman columnist Yavuz Baydar wrote, "Some retired commanders openly regretted the troop pullout on Friday, calling it premature because the strategically important Zap area was not placed under the control of the Turkish Army." Similarly, Vatan editor Bungor Mengi said, "The statement released by the General Staff shows that the continuation of operations would have been useful." Adding to speculation of operations still to come, Vatan reported Justice Minister Sahin as saying that Turkish troops would go to northern Iraq again if necessary, while Milliyet wrote that activity at the border continues despite the withdrawal of troops. Opposition CHP leader Baykal was also critical, telling a TV station, "the results are pleasing but targets that would provide a lasting solution could not be reached in 8 days."

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